

**THE THIRTEENTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
UNITY AND PLURALITY IN EUROPE
(ICUPE)**

29th – 31st July 2018
Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina



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A. International Forum Bosnia

International Forum Bosnia (IFB) is a non-governmental organisation that brings together individuals and institutions from Bosnia and Herzegovina and abroad. Our mission is to support the creation of a harmonious and united society in Bosnia and Herzegovina, based on dialogue, trust, respect, and best practice in the fields of human rights protection, the rule of law, and democracy.

IFB members believe in

- *Bosnia and Herzegovina as a sustainable plural society within a unified polity,*
- *With a rich political and cultural heritage that exemplifies the best aspects of the European spirit.*

We believe that preservation and development of our common Bosnian heritage requires

- *The restoration of trust across society, based on*
- *The development of a new intellectual community and new perspectives, through social and political analysis, and an exploration of the diversity all our traditions.*

IFB approaches these goals in two ways:

- *Deconstructing divisive ideologies based on the abuse of ethnicity, religion, and other identity and belief systems to generate mistrust, intolerance, social tension, social exclusion, and conflict in the region.*
- *Developing and promoting a new synthesis for Bosnia and Herzegovina, based on a vision of social development free from fear, hostility and intolerance and a political model that mediates rather than exacerbates antagonisms.*

Just as Bosnia and Herzegovina must be sustained as a whole, IFB believes that any progressive understanding of the country's present condition and future prospects requires an comprehensive and holistic approach, seeking a new understanding of Bosnian unity in diversity that incorporates all aspects of society, but especially geopolitical aspects, education, cultural and religious traditions and dialogue, environmental and ecological perspectives, advanced and information technologies, energy policy and responsible use of natural and renewable resources, gender issues, regional co-operation, distributive justice, sustainable development, the rule of law, human rights, social inclusion, and other issues related to the efficient transition of Bosnia and Herzegovina towards harmonious membership in the community of European countries.

One major way in which IFB pursues its objectives is through the organisation of intellectual gatherings and undertakings (workshops, panels, symposia, conferences, public lectures, exhibitions, the advancement of knowledge about Bosnia and Herzegovina, etc.), and the presentation of significant perspectives on culture, society, scholarship, and politics related to Bosnia and Herzegovina and its place in the world through its journal Forum Bosnae, working documents, and the IFB web page: <http://www.ifbosna.org.ba>.

IFB was founded in Sarajevo in 1997. It operates through its members, projects, and associated ventures. Its headquarters are in Sarajevo and there are regional centres in Banja Luka, Mostar, and Tuzla. There are thirteen thematic-research centres: the Centres for Strategic Studies, Education, Language Studies, Media, Protection of Natural Heritage, Students Programs, Historical Studies, Regional Cooperation, Gender Issues, Cultural Heritage, Interreligious Dialogue, and Technology and Economic Development (with two sections: entrepreneurship and public/private partnership and advanced and information technology), and the Centre of Interdisciplinary Research for Visual Culture.



Abstract

International Forum Bosnia is pleased to announce The Thirteenth International Conference on Unity and Plurality in Europe, to be held in Mostar from the 29th to the 31st of July 2018. The main theme of the conference will be "*The State of the Balkans: Between Imaginary Politics and Realpolitik*". The conference will take the form of a dynamic exchange between researchers, activists, and media around two plenary sessions:

- Religion, Identity and Society; and
- The State of the Balkans: Between Imaginary Politics and Realpolitik.

Each session will comprise individual presentations followed by general discussion.

Time will be allocated for up to 10 speakers, with a pool of up to 50 participants overall.

As in previous years, there will be an *Inaugural Lecture on Religion and Public Life*, to be given by a guest lecturer chosen for their expertise and leadership in the field. There will also be a complementary series of public lectures or panel discussions on related themes.

The plenary sessions and the public discussions will take place at the Hotel Bristol in Mostar, where all official participants will be provided with accommodation. Papers presented during the sessions and the inaugural and special lectures will be published in the proceedings of the conference, as in previous years. Those interested in participating are invited to apply using the registration form included with the conference documentation, available on the International Forum Bosnia website: www.forumbosna.org

1. Project Description

IFB is pleased to announce **The Thirteenth International Conference on Unity and Plurality in Europe** to be held in Mostar in July-August 2018, on the theme of *The State of the Balkans: Between Imaginary Politics and Realpolitik*. This topic has been chosen to allow discussion of the ongoing reconfiguration of relations in the Balkans on the occasion of the one hundredth anniversary of the end of the First World War.

The two main panels will be on *Religion, Identity, and Society: Europe and the Plurality of Public Life* and *The State of the Balkans: Between Imaginary Politics and Realpolitik*.

International Forum Bosnia has hosted twelve annual **International Conferences on Unity and Plurality in Europe** (ICUPE) since 2006 in the town of Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Previous conferences have been on: the *Muslim Question in Europe*; the *Roma Question*; *Cultural Diversity*; *Religion and Public Life*; *Diversity, Religion, and the University*; *Globalization, European Universalism, and the Other Europe*; *Peripheral Perspectives on European Identities*; *Bosnian Religious Plurality in a Global Context*; *Economic Recovery, Social Reconstruction and Environmental Stewardship*; and *The Spectre of Migration in Europe*.

The conferences have attracted participants from leading universities in the Balkans, Europe more widely, the Near East, North America, and Japan and China, as well as from relevant non-governmental and civil society organisations and political life.

Since 2009, the conferences have been opened by an inaugural lecture. The keynote speakers for 2009 and 2010 were Prof. Miroslav Volf of Yale and Prof. David F. Ford of Cambridge, respectively, the speakers for 2011 were the noted American author and public intellectual, Jim Carroll, and Prof. Olivier Thomas Vernard of the *Ecole Biblique* in Jerusalem, and in 2012 the inaugural speakers were H. E. Prof. Aref Ali Nayed and Prof. Gil Anidjar of Columbia University. In 2013, the inaugural speakers were Prof. Fikret Čaušević of Sarajevo University and Prof. Ian Almond of Georgetown University in Qatar. In 2014, the speakers were Prof. Gareth Jones of Ming Hua College in Hong Kong, and Prof. Kadrija Hodžić of Tuzla University. The speakers in 2015 were Professor Hasan Muratović of Sarajevo University and Dr. Mile Babić of the Franciscan Theological College in Sarajevo. In 2016, the speaker was Prof. Goran Larsson of Goteborg University. In 2017, the inaugural speakers were Prof. Fikret

Čaušević of Sarajevo University, Prof. Slobodan Prosperov Novak of Zagreb University, and Prof. Azra Hromadžić of Syracuse University in New York.

Since 2009, the conference has also included a number of public lectures on topics of plural heritage, plural traditions, and human rights, as well as an annual public panel on nationalism in the Balkans, in which leading experts, Prof. Ivo Banac of Yale and Zagreb Universities, Sonja Biserko of the Serbian Helsinki Committee and Prof. Rusmir Mahmutćehajić of the International Forum Bosnia, present their report on developments over the preceding year and their assessment of the outlook for the coming year.

2. Introduction

The Conference is a unique global initiative. It combines pluralist perspectives on religious thought with social scientific research on tolerance, civil society, cultural heritage, and identities and the interpretation and application of modern and traditional understandings of the relationship between religion and public life. The entire conference is conceived as a long-term exercise in developing international networks for this type of exchange of knowledge, views, and approaches. The organizers believe that this will contribute to the interpretation of religion as an active factor of peace and act as a barrier to its abuse by ethno-national, ethno-religious, and other ideologies and sources of tension and conflict.

3. Situation analysis

The past year (2017) has seen the routinisation of discontent and disbelief, the entrenchment of reaction, and increasing polarisation and radicalisation under the banners of identity politics. New lines of engagement have been drawn up in what often seems to be a replaying of the culture wars (albeit, naturally, as farce this time): from the #metoo movement through the escalation of racial tensions in the United States to the national-identitarian confusion in Europe, with Brexit to the west and anti-Islamic and far right politics to the east.

This ideological ferment has been accompanied by a somewhat curiously stable instability at the political and economic levels.

In the United States of America, despite all the noise and spectacle, the checks and balances of outraged interests seem to have successfully clipped the wings of the executive presidency, just as it appeared in the greatest danger of tipping over into elective despotism. Satisfaction with the underlying absence of change has been evident in the bullishness of the

stock markets through President Trump's first year in office. Even though there was a significant correction in the markets in early 2018, with gathering signs of protectionism and trade war, there is little appetite for any substantial or sustained change in course among international business and political elites.

In China, the combination of economic growth, social change, pressures towards democratisation, and a changing international environment have provoked a flight to the safety of the known and a revival of Maoist patterns, with the institution of Xi Jinping thought and the creation of a presidency-for-life. The Chinese president thus seems set to become as permanent a fixture on the international political scene as President Putin of Russia (himself practically unopposed in the coming Russian elections), or, indeed, his strategic partner-du-jour, President Erdogan of Turkey. Generally speaking, 2017 was a good year for strongmen, except in parts of Africa.

It is against this background that one may note the raising and then quieting of tensions on the Korean peninsula, through Olympian diplomacy, without any of the fundamental issues being resolved, or even seriously tackled. Events in the Philippines and in the Gulf (especially Saudi Arabia) also suggest the potential for a wholesale reconfiguration of long-established patterns of international relations, a shifting of diplomatic tectonic plates, but, despite the odd surface flareup, there has proved to be little appetite even to acknowledge these changes. Wherever possible, there has been a reliance on "business as usual", out of respect for the new principle of the new world disorder: fragility. Thus, it has proved possible for European and world elites to live with the situations in Syria and Yemen and Burma and the Ukraine, so long as they are contained and deplored.

In Europe, too, the stabilization of instability has been the order of the day. While the rise of populism that was such a prominent feature of 2016 seemed to have been halted in 2017, not least by the election of President Macron in France, it has in fact been replaced by continued political and electoral instability in the United Kingdom, Germany, and Italy, in all three of which a pincer movement of right and left populisms is causing paralysis of the centre. This is accompanied by a hardening of the axis of intolerance and revisionism that runs from Poland through the Czech Republic to Hungary and into the Balkans. Key features of this new politics are anti-EU-ism, anti-Islamicism, anti-immigrationism, and anti-liberalism, all in the name of Christian Europe, a whitewashing of the national(ist) past of its Fascist collaborationist stains, an insistence on national sovereignty as the remedy to the ills of

globalisation, and a turning away from both the EU and its technocratic values and the Anglosphere and its liberal values (with an almost involuntary, compensatory, but hardly heartfelt turn towards Russia).

It is symptomatic of this situation that the migration problem in Europe has been shelved, rather than solved. The same is true of Europe's economic problems, with a modest economic upturn barely concealing a failure to deal with the same fundamental flaws that gave rise to crisis in the first place. So it is hardly surprising that Europe's considered response to the challenge of Brexit (and the recalcitrance of the Hungarian-Polish axis and resurgent Russia's tactical entente with Turkey and new member-state Croatia's intransigence over border disputes with Slovenia) has included the traditional tactic of dangling the prospect of EU membership sooner rather than later to the remaining outcast-states of the Balkans. Consequently, on the hundredth anniversary of the end of the First World War, the Balkans and the adjacent areas of the near and Middle East find themselves involved in a reformulation of the Eastern question for a new millennium. While a hundred years ago, a new Balkan order was carved out on the basis of an ultimately misguided Wilsonian idealism of self-determining nation states, the Balkan states of the present find themselves stretched between the dictates of great power *realpolitik* and cynical manipulation of the nationalist imaginary by their entrenched local political elites. Increasingly, it seems that the leaders of the Balkan states and their great power counterparts, within the institutions of the EU, its member states, Russia, and Turkey, are once again playing with fire in the tinderbox of European conflict.

4. Objectives

The Conference objective is to investigate both theoretical models and concrete practices through which religious orientations and secular models of politics and society engage with one another in the European space, with a particular stress on minority perspectives. Its guiding principle is that if relations of tolerance and understanding between groups are to be built and a civil society shaped, the perceived barrier between secular modern and more traditional religious values must be broken down. Political orientations and social practices must be developed that will draw on both religious traditions and the insights of secular modernity in new and creative ways.

5. Partnerships

As this is a regional project, it is supposed to enhance regional cooperation and collaboration by creating stronger cross-border cooperation between citizen and other groups to address common challenges, sharing best practice throughout the region, establishing regional networks, building networks among governments, NGOs, civic initiatives, or other institutions working to improve understanding and cooperation throughout the region.

6. Programme

The conference programme has two separate but related components.

The core activity is the three plenary sessions, at which academics and activists from Bosnia, the wider Balkan region, the near East, Europe, and further afield will present individual papers, to be followed by open discussion. The three sessions are thematically linked with a view to developing new understandings of the intersection of value systems with public life, particularly with regard to social coexistence and plural communities. The topics proposed are:

1. Religion, Identity and Society; and
2. The State of the Balkans: Between Imaginary Politics and Realpolitik.

These sessions will be introduced by an Inaugural Lecture on Religion and Public Life, to be given by a guest lecturer chosen for their expertise and leadership in the field.

The second activity is a series of two public lectures and discussions.

The plenary sessions will be on:

a. Panel 1: Religion, identity and society

As in previous years, the first panel will be on "Religion, Identity, and Society," a problematic of increasing relevance and urgency in today's world. There are no forms of society or of identity which are not informed by values. Such values need not be monolithic or shared by everyone in a given society, but they must include at least the possibility of coexistence and mutual acceptance as a framework. Religion is a term for one of the major channels through which such values have traditionally been passed on and forms of identity reinforced. A free society will respect the role

of religious and traditional identity systems in the creation of its constitutive diversity. It will allow them a public voice and a role in public discussion of policy, rather than insist on a reduction of the terms of debate to the level of the supposedly objective or technocratic. The converse is that religious viewpoints must not be accorded cognitive or emotional privilege in argument and debate. Nor do they provide grounds for exemption from fundamental moral or legal obligations. If a religion cannot stand up to critique based upon the transcendental conditions of liberal, that is free, community, then it has excluded itself from the public sphere, which is simply this: the common area guaranteed by the transcendental conditions of free discourse. It is imperative that the public sphere be constituted so as to allow the fullest possible range of views to be expressed that do not violate the sovereign principles of coexistence and mutual toleration as expressed in this concept of the conditions of liberty.

b. Panel 2: The State of the Balkans: Between Imaginary Politics and Realpolitik.

Caught between the crisis of the European Idea and the contemporary revival of the Eastern Question, the Balkans is in focus again, for all the wrong reasons.

More than any other trans-national entity, the European Union is both the locus and the product of imaginary politics, owing its existence to a fusion of idealism, fear, cynicism, and arrogance. Its fundamental basis is not a convergence of economic self-interest, but fear over the alternative, a fear that is itself based on Europe's self-identification with progress, civilisation, democracy, respect for the individual and for human rights, ultimately with humanity itself. In European eyes, when Europe fails, all that is best in the world fails. And when Europe fails, it fails in the Balkans, because the Balkans are Europe's Shadow, its dark self.

Consequently, the politics of the European imaginary are pursued using the methods and techniques of realpolitik and the chosen arena is the salvation of Europe through the salvation of the Balkans.

Paradoxically, the other players in the re-emergence of the Eastern question, Russia and Turkey are fundamentally cynical and realistic in their politics, but pursue them through the methods and techniques of political idealism and the politics of the imaginary (of national solidarity, of hope, of aspiration, of fear, and of enmity). And their chosen arena is the Balkans, not in pursuit of a warm water port or some other 19th-

century geopolitical ideal, but because it is the soft underbelly of the European ideal and the point at which European identity hardens around questions of religion, ethnicity, and national self-determination. Russia and Turkey pursue their economic and political interests in the Balkans under a cloak of ethnic and religious brotherhood. Their pretended solidarity is precisely calibrated to sow discord and create division, not merely within the Balkans, but within the European project. This policy has purchase less because it resonates with how the people of the Balkans view themselves than because it resonates with the interests of the entrenched and dominant elites, whose lip service to the holy cow of EU membership belies a somewhat more nuanced relationship. At very best, their approach to reform tends to be somewhat like St Augustine's: Lord make me good, but not yet.

To complicate matters further, in the Balkans, Europe's need for hard external borders runs up against the dynamic principle of Balkan politics, which is that internal solidarity depends upon the exploitation of relations between neighbouring states, particularly through mutual misrecognition of each other's borders in the name of their mutually incompatible greater national aspirations. The theme of this panel is to explore various ways in which the exploitation of the national imaginary and imaginary politics forms the very soul of elite realpolitik in the Balkans and what this suggests with regard to the prospects for sustainable and peaceful development in the area and for its integration into the European project.

8. Materials and interaction

Chair speakers will be expected to prepare written contributions in advance. The complete agenda and accompanying materials (original contributions and selected readings) will be prepared for each panel and sent to participants in advance.

9. Participants

The conference programme includes researchers from all over the world, as well as participants in various enterprises focused on understanding and strengthening trust among the different collective identities in contemporary societies. Participants at the conference are leading researchers from all over the world. The panels are open to interested politicians

and policy makers, researchers, third sector activists, and the media from the region and beyond. Scholars from organisations involved in the preparation and implementation of the program are invited to be introductory speakers.

10. Publications

Following each conference, the materials that were basis for the plenary sessions have been collected and conference proceedings prepared as issues of the journal *Forum Bosnae*.